

Introduction to Prose and Poetry  
Spring '24 Semester  
**Section number:** CRWRI-UA.815.008  
Mon/Wed 8:00AM-9:15AM

Instructor: Doug Ross  
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Office Hours: By Appointment, Location TBD

Howdy–

This course is intended as an introduction to the study and practice of creative writing. Our class time will be split between discussion of assigned readings, writing exercises, and workshopping student pieces. We'll cover the two 'major' genres—fiction and poetry—but will explore creative non-fiction and hybrid forms as well.

You don't need a prior history with workshopping to take this class. Everybody starts somewhere, and this is as good a place as any. Even if you have started, we'll be starting again anyway (it won't take long).

Writing is a strange, and highly personal, and, ideally, rewarding pursuit. My goal is to help break down certain techniques and approaches to the craft, to make you more confident as a writer, and give you exposure to the process of workshopping.

### **How It Works**

Mondays we'll largely devote to discussion of assigned readings, free-writing, little exercises, etc. It is very important that you come to class having read the assignments (otherwise, folks, what are we doing?)

Remember: this isn't a graduate lit course, and I don't expect you to have some deep grasp of theory or past familiarity with literary history. What matters most are honest reactions, how the piece made you think about the craft concepts we're discussing and your own writing. In this context I struggle to see how there could be 'wrong' answers. So let's all come prepared to talk!

Some Mondays, we'll have a (very short, ~300 word) writing assignment due, typically either a reading response or craft exercise. Please bring in a printed copy to submit to me, or email me before class (I may ask you to bring printed copies if I want us all to read them, but I'll specify beforehand).

All course readings will be provided by me either electronically or via handout.

Wednesdays will be our workshop day.

### **For Those Submitting Work:**

- You can submit whatever genre of work you want from the beginning. It does not have to correspond to the genre we're discussing that particular week.
- Every person will workshop at least twice. You must submit at least one piece from each genre (one story and one poem, one story and one CNF, or one CNF and one poem).
- Fiction and CNF submissions should be between 5-15 pages, double spaced, 12 point font, pages numbered. You can submit either a single story, or several smaller stories. In general, I don't recommend submitting novel excerpts, but if you do, I would ask that you A. Submit from the *beginning* of the book, and B. Attach a note with some further context for the broader piece.
- Poetry submissions should be between 3-6 pages. Cram as few or as many poems as you want into this limit.
- **Submissions are due by email the Friday before your workshop day. Please be sure to cc the whole class.**

### **For Those Critiquing Work (Everyone else):**

- Please print a copy of each submission. Read and make notes and line edits on these manuscript copies, and bring them with you to return to the authors on Wednesday.
- In addition, write a 300-500 word response letter for each of the writers being critiqued (or longer, if you have more to say). You can either bring these to class on Wednesday, or email them before class starts. If printing, please make additional copies for me. If emailing, please CC me.

### **Final Portfolio**

At the end of the semester you will turn in a final portfolio.

This will include all of the stories and poems you turned in for class, with revisions reflecting the feedback you received in workshop (whether or not you chose to listen to it!) The important thing is to demonstrate that you have spent time reworking areas of potential improvement in your work.

At the front of the portfolio, please attach a short cover letter explaining some of these changes and what the process of revision was like for you. We will talk more about the portfolio later in the course.

## Grading

Your final grade is broken into:

Participation (Attendance, in-class discussion): 30%

Workshop (Pieces submitted and written feedback): 30%

Final Portfolio: 25%

Responses/Writing Exercises: 15%

**Attendance:** Please come to class, and come on time. I am (believe me) aware that we start on the early end of the waking day and appreciate you making the effort to be here and ready to work.

Students are allowed one unexcused absence (no questions asked)\*\*. Unexcused absences after that point will affect your letter grade. Please let me know if you need to miss class.

In addition I'll excuse lateness of over 10 mins once, but after that point it may also start to affect your grade.

\*\*The only exception to this is on your workshop day. **You've got to come to class on days you are being workshopped**, as it will affect our whole class schedule otherwise, and be a loss to you.

**Electronics:** Laptops, tablets, phones etc. are allowed to pull up assigned readings for our Monday discussions. I figure we can save that much paper, at least.

All other moments—and especially when we are workshopping—I will ask that you put them away. We want to maximize everyone's presence and participation as much as possible, and in my experience, devices are a distraction to yourself (and whoever's next to you. They will be looking).

Of course, if you have specific personal needs that require using one of these devices let me know and it will be accommodated.

**Plagiarism:** ‘Great writers steal’, etc, but you can’t, actually. Not while you’re at NYU (it really doesn’t fly outside these walls, either).

I encourage students to familiarize themselves with the University’s academic integrity policies. I’m obligated to report instances of plagiarism or academic misconduct to the department.

The good news is there’s no reason to steal another person’s work, or use an AI. It defeats the purpose and is depressing (don’t you think?) If you are having trouble completing an assignment on time, let me know and we can figure something out.

**Office Hours:** Meetings with me aren’t required, but I’m happy to schedule something with you if you’d like to discuss anything related to the class or your work.

**Disability Disclosure Statement:** Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, or at 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor.

**Student Wellness Policy:** Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

## **Schedule**

Note: The date the readings are listed reflect the date they are due. Some pieces may be subject to change. I’ll always confirm ahead of time which readings we’re actually doing.

### WEEK 1 - Preliminaries

Mon 1/22: Introductions; course overview; workshop etiquette; workshop sign-ups; group reading

Wed 1/24: “The 39 Steps” by Frederick Barthelme; “10 Recommendations for Good Writing Habits” by Lydia Davis; “7 Reasons Not To Write Novels (and 1 to Write them)” by Javier Marias; Mock workshop

## **SEGMENT I : PROSE**

### WEEK 2 - Animating Story (Fiction)

Mon 1/29 - “The Signing” by Stephen Dixon; “Dolgushov’s Death” by Isaac Babel; “The Bed Moved” and “Write What You Know” by Rebecca Schiff

Wed 1/31 - Workshop

### WEEK 3 - Voice, Character (Fiction)

Mon 2/5 - “Love Too Long” by Barry Hannah; “Chess” by Kjell Askilden; “Sororally” by Garielle Lutz; Introduction to *My Friends* by Emmanuel Bove

Wed 2/7 - Workshop

### WEEK 4 - Dialogue, Drama, Intention (Fiction)

Mon 2/12 - Excerpts from *Loving* by Henry Green; Excerpts from *Blasted* by Sarah Kane; Excerpts from *American Buffalo* by David Mamet

Wed 2/14 - Workshop

### WEEK 5

Mon 2/19 (NO CLASS; President’s Day)

Wed 2/21 - Workshop

### WEEK 6 - Burying and Unburying Meanings (Fiction)

Mon 2/26 - “The Bucket Rider” by Franz Kafka; “The Witch” by Shirley Jackson; “The Lazy River” by Zadie Smith

Wed 2/28 - Workshop

WEEK 7 - The Whole of Life (Fiction)

Mon 3/4 - "Gusev" by Anton Chekhov; "To Kill a Child" by Stig Dagerman; "I Want To Live!" by Thom Jones

Wed 3/6 - Workshop

WEEK 8 - Memoir and Non-Fiction

Mon 3/11 - Selections from *Autoportrait* by Edouard Leve; Selections from *Things Seen* by Annie Ernaux; Selections from *I Remember* by Joe Brainard

Wed 3/13 - Workshop

WEEK 9 - SPRING BREAK; NO CLASS

Think about the great spring breaks of literature

**SEGMENT II: POETRY**

WEEK 10 - Bridging Genres (Poetry)

Mon 3/25 - "The Media" by Ben Lerner; Selections from *Letters to Wendy's* by Joe Wenderoth; "Proportion Surviving" by Renee Gladman; Selections from *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane

Wed 3/27 - Workshop

WEEK 11 - Voice - Relating, Obfuscating (Poetry)

Mon 4/1 - "Widening Income Inequality" by Frederick Seidel; "Dream Song 14" by John Berryman; "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath

Wed 4/3 - Workshop

WEEK 12 - Mood and Evocation (Poetry)

Mon 4/8 - "Aubade" by Philip Larkin; "Aubade with Burning City" by Ocean Vuong; "Grodek" by Georg Trakl

Wed 4/10 - Workshop

WEEK 13 - Objects, Dedications (Poetry)

Mon 4/15 - "To Whoever Set My Truck on Fire" by Steve Scafidi; "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats; "Flies on Shit" by Frank Stanford

Wed 4/17 - Workshop

WEEK 14 - Epics, Translation, Emphasis (Poetry)

Mon 4/22 - Translations of the opening of *The Iliad* (Fitzgerald, Fagles, Wilson); Selections from *Beowulf*; Catullus 51 and Sappho 31

Wed 4/24 - Workshop

WEEK 15 - Automating, Breaking Down (Poetry)

Mon 4/29 - "If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso" by Gertrude Stein; Selections from *Magnetic Fields* by Breton and Soupault; [[More]]

Wed 5/1 - Workshop

WEEK 16 - And Then?

Mon 5/6 - Publication day – journal recommendations; tips for submission pitch letters; goodbye!